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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 18th MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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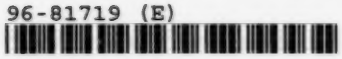

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 101: CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (continued) (A/C.3/51/L.7)

Draft resolution A/C.3/51/L.7

1. Mr. REYES RODRÍGUEZ (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/51/L.7, entitled "Measures for prevention of the smuggling of aliens by sea", said that the need for such measures was acute. The phenomenon of international migration was increasing, exacerbated by economic and social problems for which there appeared to be no immediate solutions. Against that background, smugglers of aliens, through their unscrupulous activities, were depriving thousands of migrants of the most precious right of all, the right to life. The draft resolution called for enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including the sharing of information and the coordination of law-enforcement activities, and the development of stringent legislation to punish the crime of alien smuggling. Given the importance of the problem, he would welcome contributions from other delegations, which he would incorporate subsequently into a revised version of the text. He hoped that, as in the past, the revised draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

AGENDA ITEM 103: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/51/3 (Parts I and II), A/51/38, 90, 180, 210, 277 and Corr.1, 304 and Corr.1, 309, 325, 391, A/50/509 and Add.1)

AGENDA ITEM 104: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (continued) (A/51/90, 210 and 322)

2. Mr. BARRETO (Peru) said that his country was strongly committed to the objectives laid down at the Beijing Conference and was undertaking efforts to strengthen the new social image of women by eliminating prejudices involving women in decision-making, promoting equality, providing greater opportunities for education and employment, and gradually eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women. The contribution of women to the promotion of peace and social development, particularly in overcoming poverty, through their leadership in social organizations was of great importance.

3. The recently established Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Human Development would direct the formulation of programmes to promote equality of opportunity for women and assist sectors that required priority attention for human development. That initiative was a further demonstration of Peru's commitment to the advancement of women and part of the State's general policy to strengthen its social role in order to foster the harmonious development of the nation.

4. Ms. ÁLVAREZ (Dominican Republic) supported the efforts of the Division for the Advancement of Women to implement the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. She called for adequate resources to enable it to carry out that task, and for the financial support necessary for more fruitful coordination and cooperation among the International Research and Training Institute for the

Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Division for the Advancement of Women on specific programmes.

5. Her Government had undertaken a series of measures aimed at overcoming obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development. Draft reforms designed to eliminate all types of discrimination in constitutional, civil, penal and labour laws had been submitted to the national legislature, as had draft laws establishing the equality of women's social rights and preventing violence against them. Educational programmes were being developed to promote a culture of equality, respect and non-discrimination among boys and girls.

6. The Government was carrying out the commitments it had undertaken at the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development to meet the health needs of girls and women. Development and growth models were being revised to guarantee sustainable growth and social equality, and to eradicate discrimination on the basis of sex, age, disability and regional origin. The principle of women's equal pay for equal work was being pursued, as were efforts to fulfil obligations in the areas of biological reproduction, family health and other social functions. Specific measures were being adopted to guarantee the security of and respect for older women, and the special conditions of people with disabilities were being taken into account in the process of public policy-making; access to employment for women with disabilities was being promoted as well.

7. The Government was in the process of setting up a Ministry for Women, charged with guaranteeing women's equal participation in national administration at all levels, as well as in the economic and business sectors; moreover, it would define and apply strategies designed to foster a culture of equality between men and women.

8. Mrs. MARTINEZ (Ecuador) said that her Government was aware of the need to take specific steps to reduce differences between men and women and therefore actively participated in various national, regional and international forums in that regard. Along those lines, in June 1996, it had hosted the first women's consultative meeting of the Andean Group in response to the commitment undertaken by the Inter-American Commission of Women to seek solutions to the problems of poverty and development, violence and human rights, and women's limited participation in political life.

9. In Ecuador, there was a law on violence against women, and draft laws had been submitted to provide labour protection for women, amend the Elections Act to ensure a minimum percentage of women candidates, and revise the Basic Law on the Judiciary to ensure that women filled 20 per cent of the seats in the higher courts. Eventually, all forms of discrimination against women in Ecuador would thus be eliminated.

10. She stressed the need to carry out the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women that the mandate of the Working Group on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition should be renewed and convened in parallel with the forty-first session of the Commission.

11. Ms. WRONECKA (Poland) said that her Government was committed to disseminating the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to implementing the proposals contained therein. To that end, various ministries and government agencies were working in partnership with non-governmental organizations to draw up a national programme of action for women. The programme's many goals included the promotion of equal rights and opportunities; more efficient use of Poland's human resources through increased participation by women in social, economic and political life; the elimination of stereotypes; better health care; the reduction of violence against women; and the enhancement of cooperation between the State and non-governmental organizations for the benefit of women.

12. The Government's role would be to create a legal and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of women's rights and to support initiatives on behalf of women by non-governmental organizations, citizens' groups and individuals. In order to ensure implementation of the programme, research institutes would monitor and evaluate progress in key areas. Their conclusions would be presented in the form of interim reports, on the basis of which a final assessment would be prepared for submission to the Council of Ministers in 2001. It was hoped that the first draft of the programme, which was nearing completion, would be endorsed by the Council of Ministers by the end of 1996.

13. She was pleased to report that, in May 1996, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women had visited Poland to gather information on the establishment in her country of special police stations for the protection of women victims of violence. Her delegation was convinced that international cooperation in that and other areas of special concern to women should be strengthened. She had welcomed in that regard the holding in Bucharest of a subregional meeting of experts on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Her Government appreciated the work of the Division for the Advancement of Women to promote such cooperation.

14. Mrs. RAMOS-SHAHANI (Philippines) said that her Government was committed to translating the provisions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action into practical initiatives which would improve the lives of Filipino women. Specifically, it had pledged to allocate at least 20 per cent of the national budget to social programmes and services since they touched directly the daily lives and concerns of women; to increase access by rural women to training and credit to enable them to fight poverty; to reach bilateral agreements with receiving countries on the protection of the rights of women migrant workers; to enact stringent legislation to punish those who engaged in the trafficking of women; and to improve women's health-care services in general, and family planning in particular, with a view to addressing the problem of abortion. In addition, her Government had launched a plan for agenda-responsive development, covering the period 1995 to 2025. A national commission on the role of Filipino women had been mandated to monitor the implementation of the Government's initiatives for women.

15. Her Government had recognized, even before the Beijing Conference, the need to institutionalize the mobilization of resources for gender-based activities. The General Appropriation Act of 1995 had instructed agencies to set aside a

specific proportion of their budget for projects benefiting women. Her delegation believed that such measures were an effective way of ensuring that gender-based projects were implemented, even when resources were scarce.

16. Within the United Nations, her delegation had campaigned vigorously against the abuse of women migrant workers. In raising that issue, she did not seek to open a debate on the various economic factors involved. Her overriding concern was to afford adequate protection to those women since they were especially vulnerable to violence and abuse - first, because of their sex; second, because of their status as migrants; and third, because often their work was not subject to regulation and was regarded as low-status, despite their significant contribution to the economies of receiving countries.

17. Her delegation believed that the plight of women migrant workers and trafficking were interlinked. Accordingly, it had submitted draft resolutions on those two questions to the Committee each year since 1992. At the expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, held in Manila (A/51/325, annex), many useful recommendations had been made regarding improved coordination of United Nations activities in that area. Her Government was grateful to the Member States and non-governmental organizations whose supported had enabled that important meeting to take place.

18. Mr. AG OUMAR (Mali) said that, while most of the women in his country lived in rural areas and constituted a strong presence in the handicraft and commercial sectors, socio-cultural constraints continued to relegate them to marginal roles in employment and the conduct of public affairs. Because of their low levels of education, few women had access to positions of responsibility, despite their guaranteed right of equal access to employment and equal pay. Moreover, their lack of qualifications and their difficulties in balancing the roles of worker, mother and wife meant that women were usually the first to be subjected to staff reductions.

19. To deal with the marginalization of women, the lack of resources to promote policies benefiting women and the inadequate territorial coverage of institutions charged with carrying out such policies, the Government had undertaken a national plan of action for the promotion of women. Taking into account the Beijing Platform for Action, the plan addressed six areas in which the gaps between men and women demanded strong action in the short and medium term, i.e. realizing the specific goals of sectoral educational policy, improving women's health and the reproductive services available to them, protecting women's rights and preventing violence against them, promoting women's economic advancement and their participation in decision-making, increasing women's involvement in the management of natural resources, and strengthening the institutions charged with administering policies benefiting women.

20. Ms. SYLLA (Guinea) said that her delegation associated itself with the views expressed by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and reiterated her country's commitment to the emancipation and advancement of women. While welcoming the progress made by the United Nations in promoting equality between the sexes, she noted that illiteracy, poverty, violence and the lack of access to resources continued to confine women to their traditional role.

21. She supported the idea that the Committee should hold two sessions per year to allow it to examine all the States parties' reports submitted to it, and express her delegation's gratitude to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for their support of activities benefiting women in Guinea.

22. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) said that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would require coordinated action by the organs and agencies of the United Nations system and effective initiatives at the national level. In Kazakstan, the council for women's and family affairs and demographic policy was coordinating the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. The council, which was a consultative body, had recently prepared a national report on the situation of women and the family in Kazakstan, on the basis of which the Government had drafted a programme on women and children in Kazakstan.

23. Her Government was eager to enhance cooperation with the United Nations specialized agencies. A joint project was currently underway with the Governments of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and in cooperation with UNICEF, to assist women and children in the Aral Sea region, where the deteriorating state of the environment posed a grave threat to health. Already, environmental factors, coupled with social and economic problems, had led to rising rates of infant and maternal mortality and a high incidence of disease. Other projects included joint initiatives with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to promote employment and with the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNFPA to improve women's reproductive health by formulating national guidelines on family planning.

24. Her Government was determined that women's potential should be more fully utilized during the period of transition. In particular, women should be enabled to play a greater role in decision-making, in both the executive and legislative branches of power. Currently, women were underrepresented in both the Government and the parliament. With the help of UNDP, her Government intended to carry out a study of that problem. The support of UNDP had enabled a Kazak delegation to participate in the latest session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the first occasion on which the international community had considered its response to the Beijing Conference. Her Government was committed to the implementation of the Platform for Action, but was aware that it would be a long-term process which could be completed successfully only with the cooperation of all States and the support of the United Nations system.

25. Ms. BARGHOUTI (Observer for Palestine) said that women's issues should be considered at the highest decision-making levels, and should enjoy the necessary mandates, financial resources and follow-up among Governments and non-governmental organizations. She called upon the United Nations bodies and relevant international organizations to take more direct action to achieve the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

26. She expressed appreciation for the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women with regard to the situation of Palestinian Women under Israeli occupation, and expressed the hope that more concrete action would be taken in the near future to assist Palestinian women to achieve their national and social goals.

27. Committees were being established to prioritize the needs entailed in implementing the Beijing Platform and to assist the Government and concerned non-governmental organizations in the development of detailed work plans for the implementation of specific activities corresponding to the priority areas of need for women. Her delegation was grateful to UNIFEM and the European Union for assisting Palestinian women's endeavours to achieve their objectives.

28. However, Palestinian women's efforts at advancement and attempts to improve their condition and status continued to be greatly hindered by the oppressive policies and practices of the Israeli occupation, whose detrimental effects were felt particularly by women and children.

29. The Palestinian Authority was ready, with the help of the international community, to provide women with the financial and educational support necessary. It was the obligation of Governments to promote and protect women's rights; those rights should not depend solely on political, economic, cultural or moral considerations.

30. Ms. ANNBAR (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the situation of women in many developing countries had not noticeably improved, owing to difficult economic and social conditions. In many parts of the world, women were still subject to discrimination, violence and all kinds of exploitation, and were denied freedom and human rights. Despite the efforts of a number of United Nations bodies concerned with women, the goals of the advancement of women, respect for their human rights and their increased participation in decision-making had yet to be reached in many countries, and women remained unrepresented in the public life of most societies.

31. The outcome of the Beijing Conference reflected the determination of the international community with regard to the advancement of women. While it was recognized that implementation of the Platform for Action was the responsibility of Governments, a favourable economic environment was necessary in order to achieve the full integration of women in development. Special consideration should be given to the circumstances of those, such as the Palestinian women, living under occupation, in situations of armed conflict or facing other special difficulties.

32. Her country had taken a number of administrative and legislative measures to ensure the advancement of women at all levels, enable them to enjoy their rights and participate fully in development. Libyan women were guaranteed free education and the right to work and there was no job, including the highest legal positions and in the armed forces, that was closed to women. Women participated in political life through the People's Committees. A national council had been established and entrusted with following up and implementing the Platform for Action.

33. Despite the impressive progress made by her country with regard to the advancement of women, it was currently facing a number of difficulties due to the unjust sanctions imposed on it by the Security Council. The sanctions had led to the death in childbirth of more than 500 women, due to lack of medical supplies or the inability to transfer difficult cases. Similar sanctions had been imposed on many peoples for political reasons, and the first victims were always women and children. It was imperative that political disputes should be

settled by peaceful means, as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, and that all sanctions which threatened the advancement of women on their enjoyment of their human rights should be lifted.

34. Mr. AL-MIDHADI (Qatar) said that the final decades of the twentieth century had seen an increase in the attention paid to women's issues, which could be observed in the activities of the United Nations, and in the efforts made by Governments and relevant organizations to ensure women played an appropriate role and participated fully in society. The Fourth World Conference on Women had been the most recent attempt to change the situation of women, which remained stagnant in most parts of the world.

35. His country had, since independence, given priority to women's issues, encouraging women to study and to participate fully in Government and the private sector. Women in Qatar had made important progress towards equality with men in regard to education, the job market, health and social services.

36. There were currently no internationally agreed guidelines on dealing with violence against women, particularly with regard to women migrant workers, but the latter could be dealt with through bilateral or multilateral agreements. Since Qatar was host to a number of those workers, it had provided them with safeguards respecting their relationship with the employer. Laws specified the rights and duties of both employer and employed and outlawed the use of violence in any form. His delegation reaffirmed the vital role played by women, and would continue to work for the advancement of women, the elimination of discrimination against them and their protection from violence.

37. Mr. PASHAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that expanding the rights of women in the political, economic, social and other fields was important in countries with economies in transition, including Azerbaijan, which, moreover, had been subjected to aggression by Armenia. Wide participation by women in economic and entrepreneurial activities, management, peace-building and conflict resolution would help to solve many related social problems. Accordingly, his delegation supported the efforts of UNIFEM and INSTRAW. Those bodies should give greater attention to questions involving technical and other assistance to countries with economies in transition, particularly those experiencing the harsh consequences of armed conflict.

38. Azerbaijan attached importance to the implementation of Commission on the Status of Women resolution 40/1 on the release of women and children taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned. That resolution urged all parties to armed conflicts to provide information and unimpeded access to specialized assistance for women and children taken hostage and requested the Secretary-General and all relevant international organizations to use all their capabilities and efforts to facilitate their release. Unfortunately, Armenia, which was occupying 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan, still refused to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian organizations to visit places where Azerbaijani women and children taken hostage during the aggression were thought to be held. As a result of Armenia's aggression, over 4,600 Azerbaijani civilians were listed as war prisoners, hostages or missing persons, including some 300 women, 60 children and 250 older persons. The overwhelming majority were being kept in undisclosed locations by the Armenian side and therefore did not appear on the lists kept by ICRC.

39. As a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, his country was prepared to consider the proposed amendment to the Convention in order to ensure that the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had sufficient time to carry out its mandate and consider the reports of States parties on time, thus significantly reducing its backlog.

40. Mrs. VARGAS (Nicaragua), speaking also on behalf of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, said that the Beijing Platform for Action had to be implemented in stages in accordance with the specific situation in Central America. She stressed the important role played by women in conflict prevention and resolution as well as refugee and displaced women in peace-building. UNICEF was carrying out excellent work in preventing disease and reducing maternal mortality in various regions of the world, particularly in Latin America, where an educational strategy for women was being implemented. The countries of Central America also attached great importance to the fact that UNDP had included development programmes for women as one of its priorities.

41. The Beijing Platform for Action could not be implemented in the same way everywhere. Strategies varied according to regions and levels of development. For most developing countries, it was a question of a gradual process of changing practices and attitudes and eliminating forms of discrimination against women that had existed for centuries.

42. The Latin American and the Caribbean region was the only one that had included a gender perspective in its regional platform. Accordingly, she noted with satisfaction that the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/51/322) indicated that a gender perspective was being incorporated in various intergovernmental forums and that the Secretariat would see to it that that approach was applied by the various United Nations programmes. One of the greatest achievements in Nicaragua had been the inclusion of gender-based criteria in public policies. Attention had been given to strengthening the Nicaraguan women's institute, which participated in the Cabinet and in development-planning bodies.

43. The Government of Honduras had taken steps to achieve its national objectives and was implementing programmes for the advancement of women and updating its legislation in that field. In February 1996, El Salvador had established an institute for the advancement of women, an autonomous body dealing with technical, financial and administrative questions. The institute had its own legal personnel and its functions included the elaboration and implementation of the national policy for women.

44. The countries on whose behalf she was speaking would prefer a separate draft resolution on the implementation of the outcome of the Beijing Conference, since there did not seem to be a consensus on an omnibus resolution on the two agenda items under consideration.

45. Mr. PEDERSEN (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that one month after the Fourth World Conference on Women, the General Assembly of the Federation had requested its Secretary-General to revise the Plan of Action on Women in Red Cross and Red Crescent Development, particularly with regard to building gender perspectives

into all operations, responding to violence against women, particularly those in refugee and conflict situations, and income generation. Accordingly, gender integration had been made paramount in strategies for women in development. Recognition of the differences between men and women in situations of vulnerability would maximize the success of the Federation's relief and development programmes. Staff and volunteers in national societies worldwide were being trained in the design and management of programmes to meet the different needs of vulnerable men and women.

46. In each major region of the world, the Federation was working with its national societies in order to develop regional plans of action on gender issues which would recognize the differing needs of women in those regions due to geographic, cultural and economic variations. A target for operational objectives to be reached by the year 2000 was being set in each region. In Africa, for example, where the plan of action on gender issues had already been launched, national societies would integrate gender issues further into their programmes and structures through training activities in order to raise awareness and increase commitment, and by developing the skills of national staff in incorporating gender issues into the programmes of their societies.

47. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were especially concerned about the large numbers of women and their dependents among the estimated 100 million international economic migrants, the more than 16 million refugees, and the minimum of 29 million people displaced within their own countries. Those enormous numbers of people experienced violence, deprivation, environmental degradation and economic hardship on a daily basis. A third of those who sought relief from the Red Cross and the Red Crescent were people who were fleeing or had already fled their homes owing to conflict or economic pressure. Assistance to those migrants, refugees and displaced persons accounted for 70 per cent of disaster-relief expenditure. Large numbers of the women migrant workers who sought to improve their own and their family's economic conditions were often, instead, exposed to prostitution, the risk of AIDS and other sexually transmitted disease, drugs, human rights abuses and violence.

48. He was pleased to learn that the expert group on violence against women migrant workers (A/51/325, annex) had made several recommendations on how to improve the protection of those women, and he hoped that they would be endorsed by the General Assembly. The Federation pledged to continue to promote women's protection, skills and opportunities in all activities, a commitment that had been highlighted at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference held in Geneva in December 1995.

49. Mr. DAVID (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Observer for Palestine had twice taken the floor with the sole intention of attacking Israel and had changed the non-political character of the discussion by introducing subjects suitable for other forums. As a result of the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinian Authority, which administered the West Bank and Gaza Strip and was responsible for the Palestinians living there, was the proper body for considering matters relating to human rights in those areas, including women's issues. Accordingly, the Observer for Palestine should take up those matters with the Palestinian Authority, which in turn could raise any concerns relating to Israel during the ongoing negotiations between the two parties.

50. Ms. KING (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that several States had referred to their national action plans in discussing the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. She urged all countries that had not yet done so to send copies of their plans to the Secretariat so that the Division could undertake the review of follow-up activities. Many delegations had also referred to new or revamped institutional arrangements in their countries designed to promote the empowerment and advancement of women. The Division was in the process of updating its Directory of National Machinery for the Advancement of Women. In August 1996, a note verbale had been sent to all Member and observer States inviting them to complete and submit a questionnaire by 15 October. To date, only 25 replies had been received and those which had not yet responded were urged to do so, so that the Directory could be completed.

51. The Division was currently working closely with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and acted as the secretariat for the recently established ACC Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. The Inter-agency Committee had had its first meeting in October and had decided on a short- and a long-term programme of work in keeping with its agreed terms of reference.

52. The Division was in the process of organizing three more expert group meetings to take place before the end of 1996. She drew attention to the latest issue of Women 2000, a regular publication by the Division dealing with the subject of women and the information revolution. The Division, in conjunction with UNIFEM and INSTRAW, was also establishing a joint Internet space called "WomenWatch". If the modest funds required could be found, information on global women's issues would be available on-line by early 1997. As more and more countries obtained access to Internet, the Division intended to provide information and possibilities for exchange as cost-effectively as possible.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.